

## Chapter 9

# Innovative Tourism Partnership Models: The Case of Nautical Stations in Portugal and Spain


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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter provides a deeper insight into the concept of a nautical station. More specifically, it tries to determine the importance of partnership models defined by digital platforms as a tool for a cooperation strategy in the development of new products; such is the case of nautical tourism in Portugal, a coastal nation in southwestern Europe. With this objective in mind and framed by the concept of the nautical station as a starting point, a descriptive analysis explores this topic. The case of Spain, with the development of the Nautical Resorts Association, is a model for best practice that must be not replicated but adapted to the situation in Portugal. This chapter advocates that nautical tourism, as a strategic tourist product for Portugal, will gain more prominence and strength if supported by a collaboration model between the various stakeholders of the tourism system framed by partnership models.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism activity is a fragmented industry based on small business enterprises, which makes it difficult for managers to control all components of the tourism system or all elements and stages of the decision process. This is a sector that has the capital, knowledge, and enough experience to be completely independent. So, by working together and in collaboration, it can overcome the difficulties that arise in the development of the tourism sector, which can be positive when opening new markets (Keller, 2008) or developing new products.

For some years now, particularly since the environmental impacts of tourism began to be taken on more importance, partnerships and cooperation between the various tourism agents have moved into the spotlight. Cooperation networks are characterized by initial efforts between adjacent administrations to solve mutual problems. Stable relationships arise within regions and joint efforts are successful. This allows for transactions between public and private actors on an agreement basis (more or less formal), working together on developing solutions for problems and sharing a kind of equity in their relations (Vázquez-Barquero, 1995).

In the process of tourism development, both the resources and the capacities that affect a particular part of the tourism system may be spread among several stakeholders. It seems certain that a defined number of actors can work together if the chance of reaching the goals and creating new opportunities are seen to be clearer, and if they involve themselves in team work (Bramwell & Lane, 2000). It can be said that this reliance on resources and stakeholder interdependence means that there are mutual potential and collective benefits for working together (Gray, 1989 cited in Bramwell & Lane, 2000). Cooperation is well regarded as a strategy to strengthen tourism (Hall, 1999) and, in this sense, interactions at various levels are crucial (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009). Policy, planning and sustainable development assume that they are conducted within a cooperative, joint organizational structure which results from mutual interaction between the public and private sector. This is truly relevant because these groups of actors control and operate a large number of tourist facilities. In fact, failure to consider these circumstances leads to an antagonistic and disjointed development process (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009).

The authors of this study advocate that the previous rationale should be considered in the development of tourism products, as in the case of nautical tourism. Nautical tourism is a worldwide industry that is continuously developing and achieving good economic results, especially in the European and Pacific markets. However, according to some authors (e.g. Lukovic, 2013), it has not yet achieved its full potential and this is the time for developing new markets, new products, new ideas and new concepts based on the use of ICT (information and communications technology), particularly online platforms. The development of technology tools which are grounded on a strategy based on a cooperative and joint organizational structure could definitely be a distinguishing characteristic. Management and marketing tourism organizations should take this into account, especially in the case of Portugal where nautical tourism is considered to be a strategic product, “with a coastline of excellence, with potential for surfing - recognized worldwide - and other sports and nautical activities; vast marine biodiversity; natural and infrastructural conditions for tourist cruises. Portugal offers a combination of sun and sea with beaches (579) and marinas, ports and recreational docks (52) of recognized quality” (Turismo de Portugal, 2017, p. 49).

Looking at the technological tools available to manage tourism destinations in general, and nautical resorts in particular, and taking into consideration the opinion of Zhang et al. (2018), the Internet has become the main information source when tourists search for travel information (Buhalis & Law,

2008). With both the evolution of the web 2.0 and 3.0 and mobile technology, there has been a growing number of destinations adopting technology innovations to build up their own online platforms. These platforms may include official websites, official social media pages and mobile applications, allowing destinations to offer different services, such as travel information, booking hotels, restaurants, and other services, communicating with tourists pre- to post-travel, and building the destination's image and brand (Williams et al. 2017). Recently, technological platforms that facilitate the cocreation of value have attracted the attention of several researchers. The roles of social media, collaborative work and mobile technologies (SoCoMo) in the value cocreation process have been the target of studies over the last few years (Breidbach & Maglio, 2016; Buhalis & Foerste, 2015; Singaraju et al., 2016). Digital platforms have become the basis of brand relations (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2016). These platforms provide the space for actor engagement and interaction through which consumers can obtain personalized products and services and cocreate value.

The design quality of platforms has a significant influence on their users' experience, platform use intention, purchase intention, destination selection, and destination image (Chung et al. 2015; Rodríguez-Molina et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2015). According to the research report 'How travelers are using mobile in 2019' (Travelport Digital, 2019), smartphone apps and desktop are the preferred channels for searching and booking the different services required on a trip. Leisure travellers prefer to use mobile apps for all travel activities other than searching/booking in-destination activities and car hire. This means that an online platform cannot rely only on a desktop interface and must use a mixed model (desktop and mobile app) as this is what most customers prefer.

Considering all the above-mentioned aspects, the purpose of this work is to improve the understanding of nautical tourism, nautical stations as a model to replicate and the use of digital platforms as a tool for a cooperation strategy. Starting from the concept of nautical stations, a descriptive analysis will be undertaken as a method for exploring this topic. The case of Spain, with the development of the Nautical Stations Association (for more information see <http://www.estacionesnauticas.info/>) is our model for best practice that should be taken into account and adapted to the situation in Portugal. This is already being done by the Regional Tourism Board of the Centre of Portugal (Turismo do Centro) with the recent launching of the website <http://estacoesmaritimas.turismodocentro.pt/>. Indeed, the objective of this chapter is to explore how the concept of nautical resorts should be developed based on a partnership strategy, supported by the use of technology such as online platforms. This aim will be attained through a descriptive analysis between the status quo of Portugal and Spain's nautical stations. The authors of this work strongly believe that nautical tourism, as a strategic tourist product for Portugal, will gain more prominence and strength if supported by a collaboration strategy between the various stakeholders of the tourism system framed by partnership models, such as the example of a nautical station.

## **CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND**

### **Water-Based Tourism**

Due to the multifaceted nature of tourism, new typologies have come into existence and many different forms of tourism have co-existed over the last decade. Particularly related to water as a tourism resource, according to Jennings (2007), several terms have been addressed such as marine tourism, river/canal tourism (Panne, 1990, cited in Jennings, 2007), marina-based tourism (Smith & Janner, 1995, cited in

Jennings, 2007), nautical tourism (Pavel-Musteata & Simon, 2013) and more recently lake tourism (Hall & Härkönen, 2006). Water-based tourism “relates to any touristic activity undertaken in or in relation to water resources, such as lakes, dams, canals, creeks, streams, rivers, waterways, marine coastal zones, seas, oceans and ice-associated areas” (Jennings, 2007:10). This means that this form of tourism is strongly resource-based, i.e., the natural resource (water) firmly determines the whole development and activity (boating, sailing, surfing, fishing, one-day tours, scuba diving, etc.). The most common aspect of this natural resource is that it is fixed in supply and for that reason constrains the activities and services of a given area. Table 1 examines several terms associated with water-based tourism, based on various authors.

There is a variety of water-based terms and definitions as Table 1 above demonstrates. Some authors have addressed it as coastal and marine tourism, others as lake tourism, nautical or river tourism. These are kinds of theoretical constructions of the empirical world (water-based forms of tourism), wherein some terms are determined by the water resource itself as the nuclear and basic resource (e.g. river tourism or lake tourism), or are characterized by the location of the resource (e.g. coastal or marine tourism), i.e. they are resource-based terms; others are derived from the type of recreation activities that can take place in the water, i.e. they are more experience-based terms (e.g. nautical tourism). These terms and definitions are associated with water-based tourism in a process of conceptualization where reality is classified and analysed in order to better understand the phenomena under study. In this case, the whole process of tourism development is based on water as the fundamental resource.

For this study, the selected term is nautical tourism. According to Luković & Gržetić (2007, cited in Luković, 2012), “nautical tourism is a sum of poly-functional activities and relations that are caused by the tourists boaters’ stay within or out of the ports of nautical tourism, and by the use of vessels or other objects related to the nautical and tourist activities, for the purpose of recreation, sports, entertainment or other needs” (p. 400). In order to put this definition into practice, the tourism industry needs to adopt innovative concepts, such as the case of the nautical station, which is supported by a strong collaboration between the various stakeholders of the tourism system framed by a partnership model and practice.

## **Partnerships: Definition, Practices and Models**

The concept of partnership first emerged in the 1980s and was seen as “a promising avenue to help local communities deal with specific problems in their areas” (OECD, 2001, p. 15). In response to increasing local economic pressures, the public sector, private sector and community organizations have sought ways to promote development of the local economy and employment (Rogerson, 2010). The partnership can be understood as the process of sustained collaboration, in which several organizations come together to define and achieve a shared vision (Gindl & Wukovitsch, 2002). In general, the partnership can be considered as a voluntary uniting of resources (labour, money, information), shared between two or more parties that collaborate to achieve common goals (Gray, 1985, cited in Selin & Chavez, 1995; Savrina et al., 2010). The concept can also be defined as a business network representing multi-organized groups and leaders of local authorities (e.g. municipalities) working together to achieve high levels of resource allocation efficiency (Zrilic & Peric, 2001). In this context, usual and intersectoral interactions are established between the parties, based on previously established rules and consensus (Bramwell & Lane, 2000), generating synergies and maximizing the effectiveness of the resources of each participant involved (Savrina, Grundey & Bersina, 2010).

In defining the concept of partnership, the non-binding nature of resource sharing and working together, the existence of frequent interactions between sectors based on jointly defined rules to achieve a

*Table 1. Terms and definitions associated with water-based tourism*

Term	Definitions and perspectives/Author/Year
Coastal and Marine Tourism	<p>. “Marine tourism includes those recreational activities that involve travel away from one’s place of residence and which have as their host or focus the marine environment (where the marine environment is defined as those waters which are saline and tide-affected).” (Orams, 1999, p. 9)</p> <p>. “Over the last decade, coastal and marine tourism issues – which have much in common with multiple-use and congestion conflicts traditionally faced by natural resource managers and planners – have suddenly and simultaneously become salient in the “real world” of politics and commerce, and in the academic world of policy scholarship.” (Miller, 1993, p. 183)</p> <p>. “Tourism problems – and the environmental and human issues subsumed in this category – can be solved, but this will not happen effortlessly. For the private sector to assist in the task, ethical guidance, as well as educational delivery systems, will be needed. For the public sector to develop coastal and marine tourism policies, it will be necessary to create new laws and regulatory regimes.” (Miller, 1993, p. 193)</p>
Lake Tourism	<p>. “(...) lake tourism is tourism that occurs not only on the lake itself, but also in the surrounding area. Lacustrine tourism systems therefore include the lake, the foreshore and those amenities, facilities and infrastructure in the surrounding region that support the role of the lake as a tourist attraction.” (Hall and Härkönen, 2006, p. 4).</p> <p>. “(...) the idea of lake tourism reinforces the idea that there are certain geographical entities that, because of their particular environmental characteristics are often designated as a separate type of tourism in which the specific environment serves to attract particular activities and which serve to convey certain environmental images as part of destination promotion” (Hall &amp; Härkönen, 2006, p. 5).</p>
Nautical Tourism	<p>. “Nautical tourism is a specific form of tourism that characterizes tourists traveling by water, either by sea or river, and their consent to the marina and port, specially designed for the reception of this type of tourists, for rest and recreation” (Gračan et al., 2018, p. 152)</p> <p>. “Nautical tourism is a multifunctional tourist activity with a strong maritime component that is involved in nautical tourism as a tourism phenomenon, based on seagoing vessels and ports. (Gračan et al., 2018, p.152)</p> <p>. Nautical tourism is a form of tourism which beside recreational navigation, organized with one’s own or rented boats, accommodation and/or overnights on board, includes also trips organized by cruising ship owners and travel agencies, cabin cruisers for the tourists’ rest and recreation (e.g. fishing, scuba diving, underwater photographing). (Pavel-Musteata &amp; Simon, 2013)</p> <p>. “Nautical tourism is a sum of poly-functional activities and relations that are caused by the tourists boaters’ stay within or out of the ports of nautical tourism, and by the use of vessels or other objects related to the nautical and tourist activities, for the purpose of recreation, sports, entertainment or other needs” (Luković &amp; Gržetić, 2007, cited in Luković, 2012, p. 400).</p>
River Tourism	<p>. “Rivers are a major tourism resource providing spectacular settings, recreational opportunities, waterfront landscapes in many centres of tourism interest, a means of transport and an essential source of water for human consumption.” (Prideaux, Timothy &amp; Cooper, 2009, p. 14)</p> <p>. “ (...) rivers are an important resource for tourism destinations in three ways: to provide drinking and domestic water, to facilitate the development of intense tourism-oriented environments such as landscaping and golf courses and to fill swimming pools (...) river water is necessary to grow many of the agricultural products and generate electricity needed to sustain tourism in all regions of the world” (Prideaux et al. 2009, pp. 20-21)</p> <p>. “ (...) rivers of America are both a cultural and natural resource for recreation and tourism. Rivers flowing through some of the country’s most spectacular natural scenery concomitantly flow through some of the most interesting cultural areas that epitomize the cultural and ethnic diversity that is also so much a part of the US tourism industry.” (Timothy, 2009, p. 51)</p> <p>. “Several iconic forms of tourism can be attributed to the Nile. These range from river cruising to cultural tourism based on antiquities, which happen to be accessible from this major waterway, and are also its greatest legacy apart from the water itself in such a dry environment. In many respects, the other modern tourism attractions and resources have also received a major boost in popularity through association with this river (rafting, trekking and fishing).” (Cooper, 2009, p. 92)</p> <p>. “In many European cities, riverbanks are a preferred location for hotels and restaurants primarily because river settings attract customers by providing them with an interesting view and creating a relaxing setting for dining, accommodation and other activities. Recreational parks and golf courses also make use of local streams where these are available to increase their attractiveness and profitability. Over the last few decades, waterways have become more prominent as sites for recreation and leisure activities.” (Erfurt-Cooper, 2009, p. 95)</p>

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

common goal (or more) is also essential (Amaral, 2013). It is common to consider in the definition the establishment of a long-term commitment between two or more organizations in order to achieve specific business objectives by maximizing the effectiveness of each participant's resources, often involving a change in traditional relationships to a shared culture. This relationship is based on trust, dedication to common goals, and the perception of individual expectations and values (Barlow & Jashapara, 1998). In many contexts, the concept of partnership is also considered as an integral part of the terminology used by leaders who are concerned with the environment, namely resource protection and sustainable development.

In large part, it can be said that the partnership is considered a way for the organization to achieve strategic advantage in the market. By establishing a partnership, organizations in this joint action can more easily achieve something that the client values, with a low degree of risk to the organizations involved (Crotts, Buhalis & March, 2000). Conceptually, the partnerships themselves may include two organizations interacting rapidly on a common problem, up to the point where several organizations are represented in a more consolidated structure. These organizations may be highly structured, characterized by binding legal agreements, or they may be based on verbal agreements not formalized between participating organizations (Selin & Chavez, 1995).

It is important to take into account that in developing a partnership, the public sector perspective is based on the following principle: give - take - give, whereas in the private sector it is based on the following principle: take - take - draw (Zrilic & Peric, 2001). This means that public sector groups usually have more to give to projects than they really are hoping to get from them, and private sector groups, on the other hand, want to get more than they really give, or want to give, to projects. To avoid this situation, it is important to establish public-private partnerships, since these bring more social gains than the interactions previously mentioned (Zrilic & Peric, 2001). The main practices of public-private partnerships analysed at the global level are aimed at expanding the local economy and the development of the community at large (e.g. investments in infrastructure and commercial areas and residential areas), diversifying business activity (e.g. to provide a better transport network) and to encourage sustainable enterprises (e.g. to contribute to the need to create related business projects). Intersectoral relations are also considered to contribute to the improvement of training and education (e.g. creating access and efficiency in course management), improvement of the physical environment (e.g. care for the environment and improved provision of leisure services), and improvement of the sociocultural aspects quality (e.g. historical heritage, theatres, parks and leisure areas) (Zrilic & Peric, 2001). Associated with these areas of action are the types of cooperation. On the one hand, the public sector can act as an entrepreneur, bringing this partnership closer to the context of private-private partnership or, on the other hand, a company can provide a set of services linked, for example, to transportation, education and services infrastructures.

When implementing public-private partnerships, it is important to consider the work done by the actors and identify the individual objectives. In the process of building a public-private partnership, it must be taken into account that it can be top-down (or exogenous) and in this situation, the leadership is in local government, identifying an external entity that defines the normative framework and the conditions in which the partnership will be formed. But the partnership can be of the bottom-up (or endogenous) type, and in this case, the initiative for the beginning of the process lies with private entities (Silva, 2004).

Various studies have tried to determine the key elements for successful tourism partnerships, as cross-sector collaboration can challenge the independent and competitive roles traditionally found within tourism entrepreneurship (Peroff, Deason, Seekamp & Lyengar, 2017). The success factors of

partnerships include aspects related to: the personal characteristics of those leading the partnership (e.g. strong leadership, ability to perceive risk, spirit of communication); interpersonal characteristics (e.g. communication, trust, vision of sharing and mutual adjustment); organizational characteristics (e.g. administrative support, flexible protocols, staff continuity, existence of a mediator); and operational characteristics (e.g. written plan, existence of a physical space, cooperation agreements and new objectives) (Waddock, 1991). As Spink and Merrill-Sands (1999) conclude, the elements are interdependent in such a way that their successful implementation allows the creation and development of an open and trustworthy environment.

The characteristics and advantages laid out for partnerships may also present some weaknesses, in particular the issue of democratic control and the relationship between government and democracy. The elected partners are not necessarily the leaders of the partnership, often assuming a minority position, which may further increase the separation between citizens and local government (Silva, 2004). Added to this, only a small group of private sector elements are involved, leaving out small businesses and the community at large, enhancing the real negative impacts on the lives of the most disadvantaged (ibid). In addition, other factors are related to the fact that the partnership often promotes a short-term rather than a strategic perspective, further increasing the problems that it is supposed to solve (lack of coordination and large institutional fragmentation). The partnership can be evaluated, for example, in determining the redistribution of priorities in political agendas and annual budgets of local government, and a partnership can have negative effects, which are not detected by traditional methods of evaluation (ibid).

The classification of the partnerships is also based on the duration of the cooperation between partners, allowing reduced costs, decreased distribution time, increased quality, and improved working environment and organizational learning (Savrina et al., 2010). Under this criterion, two types of partnership can be delineated. The first is called a project partnership, with a relationship of cooperation between organizations during the duration of the project itself. At the end of the project, the relationship ends and a new partnership can be established to develop a new project. The second is called a strategic partnership, which is a relationship with a high degree of cooperation between partners and occurs when two or more companies use the partnership in the long term to carry out a construction project or another activity. In this type of partnership, the knowledge obtained can be used in future projects.

However, for a partnership to be implemented, a series of preconditions are needed related to administrative practices, the desire for community participation, and the diminishing influence of central power. In fact, it is necessary to have an administrative culture that favours decentralization and horizontal cooperation, and for residents and non-governmental partners to have the desire to participate in local politics (Silva, 2004). There is also the need for central government to reduce its influence, the result of globalization.

In conclusion, it is important to observe the subgroup of the stakeholders of nautical tourism, which deserves a customized approach, for which, among other things, an insight into and understanding of their structures and topological positions is very important. The representativeness and legitimacy of stakeholder engagement activities is of crucial importance, and membership in the group may also be a potential source of dissatisfaction or resistance (Gračan, Zadel & Damir Pavlović, 2018, pp. 153-154).

The establishment of partnerships for the promotion and/or management of infrastructures to support nautical activities is an excellent example for the dynamization of activities (Sousa, Fernandes, & Carpinteiro, 2009).

## Digital Platforms in Tourism

Digital platforms are, in fact, disrupting the way the tourism sector is run from end to end – impacting the way destinations facilitate tourism, develop products, gather data, access markets and attract visitors. This digital disruption has ripple effects across the tourism industry, making it challenging for low-income markets to leverage tourism for development impacts (World Bank, 2018). A digital platform creates value when producers interact with consumers and provides an open, participatory infrastructure for these interactions and sets out the conditions for their management. The main purpose of a platform is to allow trade between users and to facilitate the exchange of goods, services or social value, allowing value creation for all participants (Genzorová, Čorejová & Stalmašeková, 2018).

These technological advances and the rise of an empowered tourist suggest that the most successful destinations in the future will be those that abandon the traditional top-down approach in favour of bottom-up and co-created branding strategies (Oliveira & Panyik, 2014).

Digital platforms are collectively considered as multilateral marketplaces designed to provide an interface for participants (Genzorová, Čorejová & Stalmašeková, 2018) and they bring several advantages based on peer reviews and other and other user-generated content (UGC) facilitated by visitors. Digital platforms have become the fastest growing...” the fastest growing and most important sources of travel information – more important than tourism boards and traditional coverage. Above all, they (1) operate with a double-sided effect, which means each party can be both a provider and a customer of the service; (2) offer interaction between stakeholders with regulations and standards, but especially internal rules of the digital platform, regulating user behaviour; (3) reduce users’ search cost and easily create value; (4) present an opportunity for emerging markets to benefit from lower barriers to entry; (5) increase access to markets and data; (6) increase access to new accommodation inventories (Genzorová, Čorejová & Stalmašeková, 2018; World Bank, 2018).

But close attention must be paid because these changes can also marginalize those less digitally able and can concentrate power in a few monopolistic platforms (Genzorová, Čorejová & Stalmašeková, 2018; World Bank, 2018).

It is also important to understand the usual participants on digital platforms. According to Weill and Woerner (2013 cited in Genzorová, Čorejová & Stalmašeková, 2018: 153), the key participants of a standard digital platform are (1) the owner of the platform – usually companies in the private sector; (2) users and consumers – individuals, communities, or business entities that use the value provided by the platform; (3) manufacturers and producers – these create offers that they sell using a chosen platform; and (4) the provider – whose role is to provide a platform interface. Another part of the platform constitutes other interested parties. The first large group involves partners in the development, the capital formation of a company that can significantly influence the emergence of the platform ecosystem. Another group of stakeholders to consider is the public sector, which understands the benefit of developing the platform for public welfare, as well as the various regulators of states that recognize any unlawfulness within the business.

In tourism, as was stated before concerning the general concept, a tourist platform can be created to improve services that will be recognizable to the customer and add value to the product (Hjalager, 2010). The use of this kind of innovation can result in higher efficiency for an organization by increasing its understanding, attractiveness and accessibility for tourists (Nielsen & Liburd, 2008 cited in Chiao, Chen, & Huang, 2018).



## **METHODOLOGY**

### **The Nautical Station as a Framework for Analysis**

According to the official website of Spanish Association of Nautical Stations (for more information visit <http://www.estacionesnauticas.info/>), a nautical station (NS) is a specialized water sports destination, acting as a point of information and advice to clients interested in water sports. According to this source, a NS is specialized in nautical tourism, which comprises companies of nautical activities, leisure, catering and accommodation in the tourist destination. The main advantages of a NS for tourists are the following:

- it provides a single point to perform a wide range of water sports as well as lodging and restaurants where tourists can also enjoy sightseeing;
- it ensures a high level of quality, safety and comfort with activity centres and tourist companies;
- it advises on any questions that tourists might have for planning vacations and water sports at a specific destination.

Similarly, for the Portuguese nautical stations (for more information visit <http://www.forumoceano.pt/index.php>), a NS is an organized network that contributes to the valorization of nautical resources present in the territory. This network includes facilities, such as accommodation, restaurants, nautical activities and other important services for attracting tourists. The main goal, according to this definition, is to create and add value to a diverse and integrated experience, based on a cooperation platform between players who offer an organized touristic product or service. Therefore, as highlighted by the West Nautical Station in Portugal, a NS aims to add a set of local and regional entities identified with a territory, involving local administrations, regional and local tourism entities, nautical clubs, marinas and pleasure ports, maritime-tour operators, hotel and tourism accommodation, among others, properly organized in a network and following a protocol of action (partnership) validated by all the stakeholders involved.

To sum up, there are key ideas actively linked to the concept of the NS that arise from the previous definitions, such as:

- It is a point of information and advice for water sports;
- It is specialized in nautical tourism and water sports;
- It comprises various activities, not only nautical, but also information about accommodation, catering and leisure;
- It is a means/tool to guarantee a certain level of quality, safety and comfort to tourists;
- It is a cooperation platform between different tourist players (public and private sector);
- It is a tool/way to create and add value to a diverse and integrated tourist experience.

Specifically, regarding the development of a tourism product, the concept of the nautical station suggests the idea of a “gateway approach” first proposed by Gunn (1972), which Gartner (2006) explores applied to water-based tourism, such as in the case of lake areas. Gateways are seen as consumption centres, which are responsible for supplying activities from different service providers in a central location. This is what a NS represents for a nautical destination. It acts as a gateway, a point of entrance to the destination and its activities as a whole, promoted in a more organized way. In addition, it helps to define territorial boundaries towards a geographical delimitation of the destination itself, based on an

integrated and coordinated model. Ultimately, and in terms of a marketing strategy, a NS might be a tool for defining the identity of a specific destination and, consequently, contributing to creating its image, promoting and branding it. In fact, nowadays a NS aims to provide the travel and tourism industry with a certification system that aims to respond directly to issues such as environmental problems (e.g. water pollution) or quality of the service providers, attracting tourists whose specific motivation to travel is water sports. A destination with a NS brand is a way to guarantee a level of quality in all services provided.

Based on this, and regarding tourism as an open system, the roles of a NS are the following (Prieto, 2018):

1. It is a gateway, an entrance to promote nautical tourism destinations;
2. It allows increased expenditure at the destination, because is a way to integrate several tourism services;
3. It boosts innovation, quality and sustainability;
4. It breaks seasonality, supporting strategic marketing and commercialization.

To sum up, a NS may be defined as an “active stay at sea”, as mentioned by the Spanish Association of Nautical Stations, in which the tourist is housed in a type of accommodation based on their preferences and learn or practise water sports, supported by number of complementary services that fill the rest of the day. This means that in a NS, the nautical activities (e.g. boat tours, wind sports, underwater activities) become the basic or core benefit of the product, having in mind Kotler’s model of the levels of product applied to tourism (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Nautical activities become the fundamental need for tourists when they are “consuming” nautical tourism, instead of being complementary or auxiliary services as in the traditional sun and beach product.

Regardless of the destination, the benefits of providing a NS can range from (1) diversifying the tourist supply with new products aimed at attracting new segments, lengthening the tourist season and increasing spending per visitor; (2) advice on quality standards to meet the expectations of the nautical tourism segments; (3) offering an opportunity for joint promotion and commercialization of the product, based on partnerships, with other destinations at the national and international level and, (4) increasing economic activity throughout the year and generation income. For this reason, a NS is a vivid example of a partnership, a joint organizational structure resulting from a mutual interaction between several stakeholders, each one with their own interests, but benefiting from a cooperative work. Therefore, the NS is an integrated service area near water, sea or lakes.

## **Nautical Stations: The Case of Spain**

Nautical stations are a network of quality nautical tourism offerings, already widespread in Italy, France and Spain, and which, as is already the case with the ski resorts, establish diversified tourist activities that include lodging, cultural events and nightlife, among others. The European Federation of Nautical Tourism Destinations (FEDETON) is the managing entity of the international network nautical stations, which strives towards the same goal: to promote coastal and lakeside destinations via a commitment to quality, and to make water sports activities a driving force behind the development of tourism (<http://www.nautical-tourism.eu/?lg=uk>). This is an important network in that it can act on the European level, giving additional tools to influence the development of nautical activities and to strengthen the representativeness of nautical resorts both on a national and international level (see <http://www.nautical->

tourism.eu/?lg=uk). FEDETON is also the author of the *European Manifest for Sustainable Nautical Tourism* (2014) in which its partners undertake to adopt concrete measures to achieve sustainability objectives. These objectives include topics such as the preservation of natural values of the territory and the functionality of coastal ecosystems; safeguarding natural protected areas and endangered species; the reduction of the consumption of natural resources and the production of waste and products which pollute by nautical activity; improving the well-being of local people by establishing opportunities for development and stable employment; the use of nautical activity to convey the transmission of values and promote education and sport, ensuring health and environmental awareness, etc. (FEDETON, European Nautical Tourism Sustainable Manifesto). The following networks are part of the network of partners of FEDETON: Associació d'Estacions Nàutiques de Catalunya (AENC) (Spain), Fórum Oceano (Portugal); France Station Nautique (France); Grad Sibenick (Croatia); Assonautica Nord Sardegna (Italy) and Donegal County Council (Ireland).

With 7,880 kilometres of coastline and excellent weather conditions, Spain is emerging as an attractive destination for nautical tourism. The Spanish Association of Nautical Stations (SANS), whose commercial name is “Nautical Stations”, is composed of 28 Spanish destinations with a long tradition in nautical tourism and activities for enjoying the sea and free time (see [www.estacionesnauticas.info](http://www.estacionesnauticas.info)). It was the General Quality Association, dependent on the Secretary of State for Tourism, which promoted the Nautical Stations project years ago with the aim of diversifying the products that Spain could offer as a destination. Presently, a NS is a specialized entity and leader in the nautical sector, which has the public support of Turespaña, seven autonomous communities and the Autonomous City of Ceuta, in addition to fifty municipalities. According to the SANS, a nautical station as an agent of tourist dynamics, includes more than 1,700 companies and around 4,500 products related to nautical tourism, all of them available for on-line commercialization in the portal [www.estacionesnauticas.info](http://www.estacionesnauticas.info). Destinations with a NS brand guarantee a high level of quality due to their nautical offer and trained, professional staff, as well as high quality standards for accommodation or restaurants. The number of NS is variable, since certification is not achieved forever. There is a regulation that all destinations must accomplish to maintain the brand and there is a need to maintain the quality since the NS brand is a guarantee.

In order to be configured as a NS, a number of nautical sports should be provided and also several categories of accommodation. The concept of the nautical station brings together not only the part of activities (rental of equipment, monitors, excursions, etc.), but also accommodation and complementary services as mentioned in the previous section. In fact, the main strategic goals of the SANS are the following:

1. Differentiating certain sun and beach tourist destinations with a clear vocation towards water sports, converting them into integrated service stations, analogous to ski resorts;
2. Structuring the current Spanish nautical offer in leading destinations and anchoring it in the practise of water sports;
3. Creating a product with quality that serves as a differentiating element of the offer of nautical sports by other countries, and guaranteeing a satisfactory experience;

As stated by the SANS, the differentiating elements of this network in Spain are, among several others:

- *Implementation and development of production, management and commercial synergies:* from an internal point of view, based on a joint management and marketing of nautical activities

and accommodation. That is, each NS constituted as an association or consortium of the different member companies has a management structure that allows the creation of products and commercialization;

- *The importance of building an image for the product in order to achieve a strong positioning in the market:* From the point of view of the demand, membership of the SANS offers guarantees of quality of service and equipment. For this reason, a quality plan is currently being drawn up in which some standards will be defined with a dual objective: defining the essential requirements that all members must comply with regarding the facilities and the service offered, and establishing criteria for the classification of new nautical activity products based on the defined standards;

In order to better understand the principles and guidelines of this selected example, it is important to identify the main requirements that a NS should fulfil, not only for the destination, but also for the NS and the company itself. Table 2 aims to schematically systematize the implementation of a NS and its incorporation into the SANS:

## **Nautical Stations: The Case of Portugal**

The Regulation for the Certification of Nautical Stations of Portugal (n.d., p. 1), states that nautical stations are, for the most part, coastal destinations and nautical tourism is an excellent opportunity to reorient some sun and beach destinations. But there are also conditions in the interior of the territories for the certification of NS, in stable water plans, namely rivers, lakes and reservoirs of dams. For potential visitors, the network offering under the name of NS guarantees the quality of the tourist product and the services provided, as well as information support and reservation of accommodation and services, in terms to be defined by the agents that compose it (The Regulation for the Certification of Nautical Stations of Portugal, n.d., p. 2).

According to the National Strategic Plan for Tourism 2027 (2017), Portugal has a coast of excellence, with potential for the practice of surfing – recognized worldwide – and other sports and nautical activities; vast marine biodiversity; and natural and infrastructural touristic conditions for cruises. The combination of sun and sea offers beaches (579) and marinas, ports and docks for recreation in Portugal (52) of recognized quality. The inclusion of nautical tourism as a strategic product for Portugal is essential to valorize this product, both in its tourism and sports. Some of the lines of action of the Tourism Strategy in Portugal are based on the axis of valorization of the territory with the affirmation of tourism in the economy of the sea: i) Reinforcement of Portugal's position as a destination for nautical, sport and leisure activities associated with the sea, on the entire coast and as an international reference surfing destination; ii) Dynamization and valorization of infrastructures, equipment and services to support nautical tourism, namely, ports, marinas and nautical centres; iii) Nautical activities for enjoyment of the sea connected to diving, sailing, canoeing, observation of cetaceans and seabirds, fishing, sightseeing tours and beach activities that integrate sustainability in the nautical culture of the sea; iv) Promotion of "routes of experiences" and tourist offers around the sea and nautical activities; v) Coastal enhancement actions, including the requalification of marginal areas and the appreciation of beaches; vi) tourism projects including health tourism' projects associated with the therapeutic properties of the sea; and vii) Appreciation of seafood associated with the Mediterranean diet.

In Portugal it is important to highlight the actual National Nautical Stations Network named Fórum Oceano – Association of Maritime Economy – which is a private non-profit corporate body that aims to

promote the maritime economy. Its mission consists of strengthening the dynamic of strategic cooperation between actors – companies, R&D centres, higher education institutions, public administration bodies – and promoting the competitiveness of the major value chains that use the sea and marine resources as central elements of their activity in order to contribute to sustainable economic growth, exports and employment and to increase the relative importance of the economy of the sea in the national economy (Correia, 2018). In 2017, Portugal was recognized by the Government of Portugal as a Competitiveness Cluster (cluster of the sea) and this also results in the fact that the Fórum Oceano Association participates in several international networks considering maritime clusters (e.g. European Network of Maritime Clusters; European Network of Maritime Clusters; BlueTech Cluster Alliance; European Federation of Nautical Tourism Destinations; Wild Sea Europe) (Correia, 2018).

Between 2014 and 2015, the Business Association of Portugal, in cooperation with the Fórum Oceano, developed the project entitled Nautical Portugal. This project had the main objective of assessing the possibility of developing a collective strategy to accelerate the structuring of the nautical sector in order to compete in the global market. The results of the Nautical Portugal project, which confirmed the need for a collective strategy, the Portuguese Nautical Group was created. This group is constituted within the ambit of the Ocean Forum Oceano and is open to the voluntary participation of all interested entities, with the maximum aim of dynamizing nautical tourism in Portugal. The next step consisted of the development of a work to develop, promote and certify nautical stations in Portugal (Forum Oceano, 2016a).

Within the context of certification of the NS, the aim should be to provide and develop various nautical activities, of which the following are examples, without detriment to others: i) Sightseeing tours; ii) Crewed and unmanned vessel rental; iii) Services carried out by river or sea taxi; iv) Touristic, sports and amateur fishing; Maritime-tourist services provided by the use of moored or anchored vessels and without proper or sealed propulsion means; Rent or use of water scooters and small vessels exempted from registration; v) Other services, in particular those relating to towing services for recreational equipment; vi) Water sports such as sailing, rowing, kayaking, surfing, power boating, underwater sports; vii) Water Ecotourism (Article 4, point 3 Regulation for the Certification of Portuguese Nautical Stations). In addition to the above described, the nautical station should have referenced its respective area of activity and identified the support infrastructures such as ports and marinas, among others, as well as support services and information and visitor services (art. 4, point 4, Regulation for the Certification of Portuguese Nautical Stations).

Thanks to the Forum Oceano network, it has already been possible to certify several nautical stations in the country (coastal and inland, sea river and lakes) that are listed here: Alto Minho, Aveiro, Avis, Baixo Guadiana, Castelo de Bode, Faro, Ílhavo, Alqueva-Moura, Coastal of Cascais, Matosinhos, Murtosa, West, Portimão, Sines, Vagos and Vilamoura (Forum Oceano, 2016b).

## **SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The purpose of this study was to provide a deeper insight, highlighting the importance of partnership models defined by digital platforms as a tool for a cooperation strategy in the development of new products (e.g. nautical tourism). As pointed out in this study, nautical tourism is a type of water-based tourism, strongly resource-based, i.e., water as the basic natural resource firmly determines the whole development and activity (boating, sailing, surfing, fishing, one-day tours, scuba diving, etc.). This natural resource is fixed in supply and for that reason constrains the activities and services of a given area. In this case,

nautical tourism is strongly linked to the natural characteristics of a specific destination, mainly defined by a sum of polyfunctional activities and relations, which in addition to recreational navigation, also includes accommodation and recreation on water. For that reason, partnership and cooperation models between the various tourism agents is of utmost importance. As a practical consequence of this situation, the authors of this work strongly believe that nautical tourism, as a strategic tourist product for Portugal, will gain more prominence and strength if supported by a collaboration strategy between the various stakeholders of the tourism system framed by partnership models, such as the example of a nautical station as presented here. This is the case of Spain, with the development of the Nautical Resorts Association, presented as a model for best practice that should be adapted to the situation of Portugal. This is already being done by the Regional Tourism Board of the Centre of Portugal (Turismo do Centro) with the recent launch of the website <http://estacoesmaritimas.turismodocentro.pt/>.

The use of digital platforms should be perceived and recognized as a suitable tool for a strong cooperation strategy within the nautical station framework. It is a point of information and advice for water sports; it comprises various activities, not only nautical, but also information about accommodation, catering and leisure; it is a means/tool to guarantee a certain level of quality, safety and comfort for tourists; and it is a means/tool/way to create and add value to a diverse and integrated tourist experience. But most of all it is a cooperation platform between different tourist players (public and private sector) for the promotion and/or management of infrastructures to support nautical activities strongly associated with cooperation networks as the fundamental basis of the model. It is recommended that in the future the nautical stations in Portugal follow the same path as in Spain and create a Portuguese Association of Nautical Stations, composed by various Portuguese destinations with a long-term goal for the development of nautical tourism and activities for enjoying the sea and free time. Future investigation should be directed toward the analysis of other best practices worldwide, in order to better understand the benefits of different models and learn from each other.

## **CONCLUSION**

The NS model seems to provide a highly effective tool for planners, managers and government officials to help make decisions for marketing strategies, particularly for management, segmenting and positioning of nautical destinations. The NS model can be applied ideally to all types of water-based destinations (coastal and lakeside destinations), both for the supply and demand side. For the supply side (destination and companies), it has the capacity to supply well-organized and structured tourism products, instead of simply providing a collection of individual activities; it adds a higher value product, components and services, which results in a better customer experience. For the demand side, the NS model is seen as a means/tool to guarantee a certain level of quality, safety and comfort for tourists, acting primarily as a point of information and advice for water sports. This study explored the NS as an innovative example of a cooperation platform between different tourist players (public and private sector), adding value to a diverse and integrated tourist experience that should be strengthen in Portugal in the future.

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## KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**Cooperation Networks:** Process of a limited number of organizations working together toward the same goal but maintaining control of their individual resources.

**Digital Platform:** Multilateral market places designed to provide an interface for participants. These can be producers, customers, other third-party service providers to network and that create collaborative results.

**Gateway:** These are seen as consumption centres, which are responsible for supplying activities from different service providers in a central location. This is what a NS represents for a nautical destination.

**Innovation in Tourism:** Market-based application of new processes and products (or forms of organizations) that have the potential to be commercialized and has to be developed to the point of being market tested. Innovation in tourism implies interactions between the traditional actors of tourism and new leaders of innovations in various applications.

**Nautical Station:** A network specialized in nautical tourism, which comprises companies of nautical activities, leisure, catering and accommodation tourist destination, acting as a point of information and advice to clients interested in water sports.

**Nautical Tourism:** A specific form of tourism that characterizes tourists traveling by water, either by sea or river, and their consent to the marina and port, specially designed for the reception of this type of tourists, for rest and recreation.

**Partnership:** Collaborative arrangement that bring together a range of interests in order to develop and sometimes also implement policies. Partnerships in tourism development usually bring together interests in the same destination but in different sectors, or parties in different destinations but with mutual interests in one issue or related issues.